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ABSTRACT

This overview of North American social science databases, including scope and services, identifies five trends: (1) growth--in the number of databases, subjects covered, and system availability; (2) increased competition in the retrieval systems marketplace with more databases being offered on multiple systems, improvements being made to the retrieval systems themselves, and more active advertising or "user education" being undertaken by the database and service suppliers; (3) increased ease of access as telecommunications facilities and technology improve and associated service costs go down; (4) continuing appearance of technological changes which affect the nature and use of databases and retrieval systems, such as microcomputers, bubble memories, and videodiscs; and (5) the development of Teletext/Videotext systems which, along with other more "user friendly" retrieval systems, will foster increased "end user" access to all forms of databases. An appendix provides a list of examples of North American social science databases that are available online. (Author/JD)

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SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA BASES AND DATA BANKS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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The current state of social science data bases and data banks in North America can best be summed up by one word -- GROWTH. They are growing in number, subject or discipline coverage, size and, perhaps most importantly, in use. Whereas only a very few years ago the number of machine readable data bases available of interest to social science libraries (and their clients) was relatively limited, considerable development has taken place in the last two years. At the beginning of the decade there were relatively few social science data bases and most that did exist were accessible only through locally available batch systems. Today that picture has certainly changed. From being the neglected "little brothers" of data bases concentrating in the physical, natural or health sciences, social science data bases have developed into extensive, mature services.

In any discussion of this topic one is immediately faced with the difficult question of what is meant by "social science" and, perhaps incidentially, what is a "data base" or "data bank" in this context. Since a particularly narrow set of criteria of what constitutes the "social sciences" would not be very useful for purposes of this paper, I will generally deal

in terms of those areas listed a quarter century ago in the UNESCO World List of Social Science Periodicals: "sociology; general psychology; cultural and social anthropology; demography; criminology; economics; political science; public administration; international relations; industrial relations; economic and social history; human, economic and political geography; public, international and constitutional law".(1) Just what constitutes a "data base" or "data bank" is often the subject of considerable debate and argument (for example, is a card catalogue a data base), but in the context of this paper the terms will be used interchangeably to refer to machine readable files of bibliographic and other source data.

It is not realistic to attempt to give any finite figure for the number of social science data bases currently available in North America. Such a calculation would constitute a moving target and any specific figure put down on paper would be out of date before the ink was dry. However, some indication of the level of this activity can be seen in the Appendix to this paper which includes only those data bases currently available on widely accessible on-line systems.

In addition, there is a vast myriad of data bases available on local, private, corporate or academic

(1) World List of Social Science Periodicals, Third Edition, Paris, UNESCO, 1952.

systems. These cover a wide range of subject areas and in some cases may in the future emerge as widely available data bases. A specific example of this type of data base can be seen in a system such as "an Information Retrieval System for the Sociology of Leisure and Sport" produced by the Faculty of Human Kinetics and Leisure Studies at a Canadian institution, the University of Waterloo.

Subject coverage ranges across all social science disciplines. There are broadly based files such as the Social Science Citation Index and the Public Affairs Information Service Bulletin. Files such as Comprehensive Dissertation Abstracts, the National Technical Information Service or the Magazine Index range far beyond the "social sciences" but do contain considerable relevant material. Specific discipline coverage is seen in such data bases as Psychological Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, and United States Political Science Documents. Others provide very specific subject information such as the Accountants Index, Exceptional Child Education Abstracts, Communications Information and Population Bibliography. In addition, there are a large number of "business and financial" services and an increasing list of newspaper indexes, all of which may be of considerable interest to social scientists.

Most of the social science data bases available in North America are produced on this continent. Although these files generally include material from other parts of the world, by their nature social science data bases often tend to be limited in their geographic interests and coverage (for example America:History and Life, the Yukon Bibliography or various national census data bases). At the moment only three social science bibliographic data bases originating in Europe are offered on major North American on-line retrieval systems; International Economic Abstracts, LABORDOC and LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts).

While the primary emphasis of this paper is on social science bibliographic data bases, the growth and development of numerical and other source data bases is an area that must be recognized. Unlike bibliographic data bases which point to something else (such as an article, book, film or document), source data bases provide "the answer" or some other primary information directly. In some instances such data bases provide numerical data (for example, the CANSIM data base of Canadian socio-economic times series) that may be retrieved directly or subjected to various manipulations by the user.

Increasing numbers of non-bibliographic social science data bases are being made available through a

variety of telecommunications links and network information services or time-sharing computer service companies. These organizations tend to be more directly concerned with marketing computer services than data bases, but to a growing extent they recognize the potential commercial marketability of the data bases resident on their systems. Most of the non-bibliographic data of interest to social scientists is in the economics/business or sociological/political areas. Included are such subjects as domestic and international financial statistics, banking and corporate financial information, demographic information, opinion surveys, radio and television survey data, currency rates, share trading information, data on foundations and research activities. Thus, some of these data bases provide "facts", others raw numerical data, and still others are a type of "referral" service (such as the Foundation Grants Index).

In addition to the on-line services there are many collections of machine readable data held within academic and research institutions. For example, the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research located at the University of Michigan has a vast archive consisting of literally hundreds of data sets of interest to all social science disciplines.

One type of data base which to some extent bridges the distinction between bibliographic and non-bibliographic is the "full text" file. This facility was first seen in legal search systems and is now available on data bases such as newspapers (the Toronto Globe and Mail offers full text of all non-advertising material appearing in the newspaper through an on-line retrieval system) or the system providing access to oral and written questions of the Canadian House of Commons.

Examination of the nature and use of social science data bases in North Ameria indicates the presence of a number of trends.

(1) GROWTH, in terms of number of data bases, subjects covered and system availability.

(2) increased competition in the retrieval systems marketplace with more data bases being offered on multiple systems, improvements being made to the retrieval systems themselves, and more active advertising or "user education" being undertaken by the data base and service suppliers.

(3) increased ease of access as telecommunications facilities and technology improve and associated service costs go down.

(4) technological changes continue to appear which affect the nature and use of data bases and

retrieval systems: microcomputers, bubble memories, other forms of inexpensive memory, videodiscs, etc.

(5) the development of Teletext/Videotext systems which, along with other more "user friendly" retrieval systems, will foster increased "end user" access to all forms of data bases.

In spite of these trends, and perhaps because of some of them, the greatest challenge facing social science librarians in North America and elsewhere in regard to data bases is to provide efficient and effective use of the vast numbers of machine readable files already available. User awareness, training and education is still a problem area as most of the data bases and retrieval systems available today are still best accessed through a trained intermediary: the search editor, librarian or information analyst. Few systems are configured such as to encourage direct "end user" access. While this situation will no doubt change as the technology develops, the role of the social science information specialist in identifying and fostering access to appropriate data bases of all types will continue in North America as elsewhere.

APPENDIX

Examples of North American Social Science Data Bases Available On-Line

ABI/INFORM	LIS SDC BRS
Abstracts of Instructional and Research Materials in Vocational and Technical Education	LIS
Accountants Index	SDC
AGRICOLA (Agricultural Economics)	SDC LIS BRS
All Canada Weekly (Law) Summaries	QL
America: History and Life	LIS
American Statistical Index	LIS SDC
Canadian Business Periodicals Index	QL SDC
Canadian Criminal Cases	QL
Canadian Newspaper Index	QL SDC
Child Abuse and Neglect	LIS
CODOC (Cooperative Documents Project)	CAN/OLE
Communications Information	QL
Comprehensive Disseration Abstracts	LIS BRS SDC
Congressional Information Service Index	LIS SDC
Congressional Record Abstracts	SDC
DISCLOSURE (records of public companies filing reports with the SEC)	LIS
Dominion Law Reports	QL
EIS Industrial Plants	LIS
EIS Nonmanufacturing Establishments	LIS

ERIC (Includes Current Index to Journals In Education and Resources in Education)	LIS BRS SDC
Exceptional Child Education Abstracts	BRS LIS
Federal Register Abstracts	SDC
F & S Indexes	LIS
Federal Indexes (Predicasts)	LIS SDC
FCR: Headnotes of the Federal Court of Canada	QL
Foundation Directory	LIS
Foundation Grants Index	LIS
GRANTS	SDC
GPO MONTHLY CATALOG	LIS BRS
Hansard Oral & Written Questions (Canada, Parliament, House of Commons: in English & French)	QL
Historical Abstracts	LIS
International Annual Time Series	LIS
International Statistical Abstracts	LIS
Language and Language Behavior Abstracts	LIS
LEXIS	Mead Data Central
LIBCON	SDC
Magazine Index	LIS
Management Contents	SDC BRS LIS
National Foundations	LIS
National Institute of Mental Health	BRS
NICEM (National Information Centre for Educational Materials)	LIS
NTIS (National Technical Information Service)	BRS LIS SDC CAN/OLE
New York Times Information Bank	N.Y. Times

Newspaper Index	SDC
PROMPT (Predicasts Overview of Markets and Technology)	LIS
PAIS Bulletin	LIS BRS
PAIS Foreign Language Index	LIS BRS
Population Bibliography	LIS
Psychological Abstracts	BRS SDC LIS
Quebec - Actualite	SDC
Revised Statutes of Canada	QL
SSIE (Smithsonian Science Information Exchange)	LIS
Sociological Abstracts	LIS
Social Science Citation Index	LIS SDC BRS
Statutes of British Columbia	QL
Statutes of New Brunswick	QL
Toronto Globe & Mail	Globe & Mail
U.S. Annual Time Series	LIS
U.S. Political Science Documents	LIS SDC
U.S. Regional Time Series	LIS
U.S. Statistical Abstracts	LIS
Weekly Criminal Bulletin (Canadian Criminal judgements)	QL
WESTLAW	West Publishing Co.
Yukon Bibliography	QL

Service Systems

BRS = Bibliographic Retrieval Services, Inc.
LIS = Lockheed Information Systems
SDC = System Development Corporation
CAN/OLE = Canadian On-Line Enquiry System (Canada Institute for Scientific & Technical Information)
QL = QL Systems Limited